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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, October 7, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "YEAST ROLLS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Recently I've had several questions about bread-making in my mailbox. Several young housewives ask about making hot yeast rolls for company meals. Letters like that just show how times do change. Once upon a time -- and not so very long ago either -- every household made its own bread. No self-respecting girl would think of getting married, let alone have a chance to, if she couldn't make light bread. Saturday was baking day just as sure as Sunday was church day. And a housekeeper was judged by the loaves that came out of her oven each week. But nowadays even the best of housekeepers is likely to buy most of the bread her family uses. And homemade rolls are a treat -- "company food" -- rather than the regular staff of life.

Of course, I'm speaking now of "light bread" or yeast bread -- terms we Americans generally use for white bread leavened with yeast. The same mixture makes our "light rolls". Rye is the only other grain beside wheat that makes a flour which will rise with yeast. So, light bread has come to mean bread made wholly or partly with wheat flour. Our other breads, except rye, we classify as "quick breads" and make them with other kinds of leavening such as baking powder, or sour milk and soda, or beaten eggs, or just air. And often we make these quick breads of corn meal or other flours or flour mixtures.

With wheat flour, yeast, and fat, the bread mixture is an elastic dough, which you "raise" and bake into a loaf that is light and spongy. But, as every housekeeper knows who has tried it, you get a very different result with any other grain. The reason is that wheat contains two proteins which, with water, develop into gluten. We make bread with liquid -- usually with milk or water -- so we have gluten in any bread mixture containing wheat flour. And gluten is the substance responsible for that elasticity of the dough -- in fact, for its rising as it does. By itself, gluten is stringy and bakes into a tough, hard substance. The more you stir batter or knead dough, the thicker and tougher and more elastic it becomes. But when you add leavening, the dough stretches or rises. And the fat in the bread mixture keeps the gluten from forming strands that would make the bread tough.

Leavening makes bread rise because it produces gas in the dough. With just the right bread mixture, and just the right amount of kneading, the gas bubbles spread all through the dough and expand it evenly. The result is a sponge-like mass of millions of little cells filled with gas. The gas expands with heat, stretching the dough until it is ready to be set by baking. This gas is carbon dioxide, given off when yeast is working. The same gas forms when you mix baking powder, or soda and sour milk, or soda and some other acid with liquid and flour.



Yeast leavens or lightens dough by causing a fermentation in it. A yeast cake contains a form of plant life called yeast -- really a living fungus. Like any other living thing, yeast needs moisture and food, which it gets in the dough. Then it grows when warmed. So you put the dough in a warm place and fermentation increases as the yeast cells multiply. But to get yeast bread ready for the oven takes hours, and that is one reason so many housekeepers have turned to the quicker and easier way of buying bakers' bread.

But yeast rolls are not hard to make at home and they're delicious with any meal. To have them any day, you can set the dough to rise the day before and stop the rising at the proper point by putting the dough in the refrigerator, or in a cold room -- never cold enough to freeze, of course. You can shape the dough into rolls, set them in the pan, and put the pan in the refrigerator. Take them out of the refrigerator next day; let them rise again for about three-quarters of an hour or less; then put them in the oven, to bake 15 or 20 minutes and the rolls are ready to serve. You can keep the dough a week or more this way, using it as needed.

As I was saying a minute ago, it is thanks to the gluten in wheat flour that we can have light breads and a variety of them. But the trick is to manage that gluten by knowing just how much to stir a batter or knead dough. Gluten develops with stirring or kneading and makes the batter thicker and the dough stiffer.

Well, here's a recipe for icebox rolls that should answer the requests from those housekeepers who want some quick yeast rolls for company meals. If you have a good memory, maybe you can keep these 8 ingredients in your mind. If not, maybe you'll want to get a pencil and jot them down. The ingredients for icebox rolls are: 1 cake of compressed yeast..... one-fourth cup of luke-warm water..... one-half cup fat..... one-half cup sugar..... 1 egg..... 1 and one-half cup scalded milk..... and 8 cups of sifted flour. Now, here's the way you make the rolls. First, soften the yeast in the water. Then, add about 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Cream the fat. Add the sugar, then the well-beaten egg, and then the cooled milk. Finally add the yeast. Stir in the sifted flour and salt until the dough is stiff enough to knead. Toss on a floured board and knead from 10 to 15 minutes -- or until the dough is smooth and elastic. Put the dough in a greased bowl. Grease the surface of the dough. Keep in a warm place until double in bulk. Turn on the board, and knead. Again grease the surface of the dough, cover it and put it in the refrigerator. When you are ready to make rolls, cut off the amount of dough you need. Shape the rolls, and put them in a warm place to double in bulk. Then bake from 15 to 20 minutes in a hot oven.

This dough will keep satisfactorily for rolls for 3 to 4 days -- even a week. By the way, you can use less sugar, but the dough loses sweetness as it stands.



